

Historical Dictionary of the Peoples of the Southeast Asian Massif

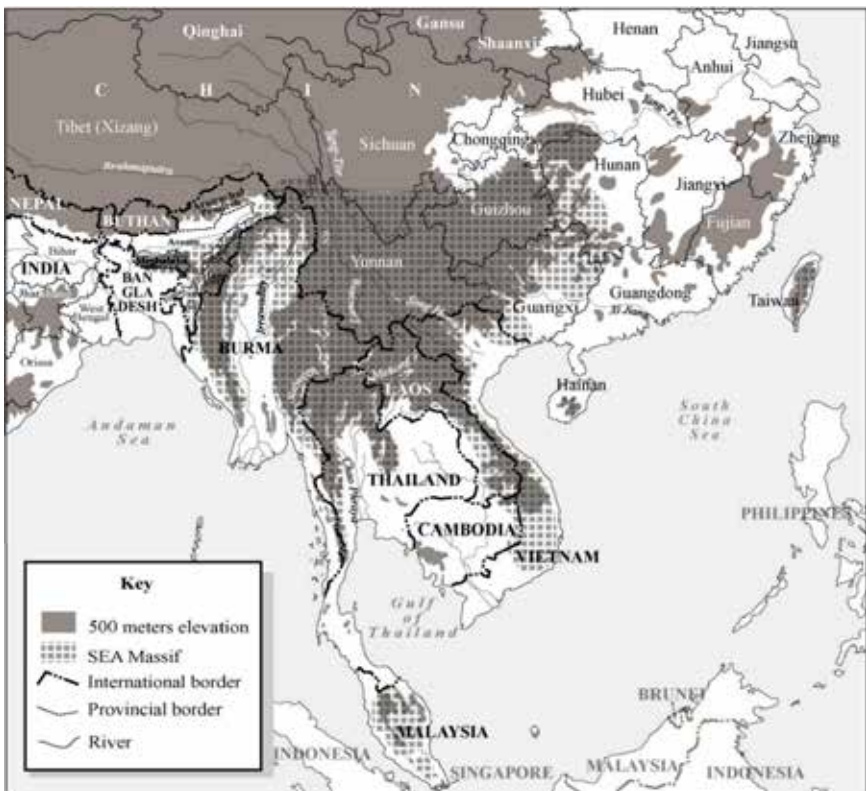
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Maps

MAP 1: THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN MASSIF



Introduction

Seeing the Forest for the Trees: Scale, Magnitude, and Range in the Southeast Massif

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This book's 2006 first edition aimed to give insight into a cluster of persistently ignored societies located in the uplands of Asia. Ten years later, some noteworthy progress has been made but overall, these hundreds of ethnic groups are still underresearched and not as well understood as they should be. As Willem van Schendel aptly put it in 2002, they are still victim to "geographies of ignorance," standing as it were in a blind spot of history.

Dwellers in the fertile lands and coastal areas of Southwest China, Northeast India, and Southeast Asia are easily recognizable. The national majority groups in each of the 10 countries discussed in this dictionary bear familiar names: the Han in China and Taiwan, the Indo-Aryan in India, the Khmer in Cambodia, the Burman in Myanmar, and the Viet (Kinh), Thai, Malay, Lao, and Bengali in their respective countries.

But how many in the broader community know of the Dong, the Buyi, or the Shan, each counting over 4 million people? The Tujia, Yi, Miao, and Hui, despite standing between 8 and 10 million people each, also manage to drift under the global radar. Even the massive Zhuang ethnicity, numbering 17 million, is hardly acknowledged outside China. Van Schendel (2002) has figured it out: Societies in upland Asia fall in the cracks between the dominant mental categories by which Asia is normally appraised.

The first edition of this dictionary helped close this gap. Perhaps its chief contribution has been to highlight a previously neglected social space, presenting it as exhaustively as possible from a different perspective than prevailing country studies frequently fraught with nation-centric subjectivity. Some precursors had opened the way (Lebar et al. 1964; Lim 1984; Wijeyewardene 1990; Evans, Hutton, and Kuah 2000), but the dictionary was truly the first book entirely devoted to Southeast Asian upland ethnic minorities with a transborder frame of reference.

Then, an unforeseen development occurred with the 2009 publication of *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* by Yale political scientist James C. Scott. In this thought-provoking book, Scott developed a stimulating and controversial analysis of state evasion in an effort to explain why "runaways" have resolved to live in

the isolated Southeast Asian Massif, which he calls Zomia (more on that in section 7.1). Debates ensued, both supportive and critical. We know for a fact, though, that in response to Scott's highly visible book, a level of interest in the region and its occupants emerged that had never been seen before.¹ In many ways, it is Scott, and by extension Willem van Schendel, who are responsible for the new attention paid to these societies. The road was then wide open for an expanded version of this dictionary.

With this second edition, it is hoped that an even broader range of new readers will find an interest in these distant populations and will try to acquire a sound understanding of their circumstances and livelihoods. Readers familiar with the 2006 edition will find abundant new and updated material, in particular with the addition of the upland peoples of Northeast India, Bangladesh, Peninsular Malaysia, and Taiwan, as well as an expanded analysis of previously less thoroughly covered areas of Southwest China, all improvements made possible by new collaboration with scholars Margaret Byrne Swain and Meenaxi Barkataki-Ruscheweyh.

The societies dealt with here now spread across 10 countries, within which they constitute minorities. However, their total numbers are equivalent to the combined populations of Malaysia and Thailand, or indeed 20 times the population of Laos. Living far from the densely occupied coastal plains and great river deltas, these upland societies show a high degree of geographical and political fragmentation and display radical cultural differences between each other as much as with lowland cultures. They speak hundreds of languages from six distinct language families—significantly more than Europe—and their wide variety of economic systems ranges from hunting and gathering, swiddening, and forest horticulture to wage work in rural areas and small towns as well as in Asia's metropolis. Truly, the societies of the Southeast Asian Massif display so much cultural distinctiveness that they defy classification.

Yet the purpose of this introduction is to provide a concise presentation of the main characteristics of these societies. It covers themes such as the land and its people, geography, languages and scripts, history and sources, religions, customary social structures, and relationships to the lowlands and the state, and concludes on the main challenges faced by these societies today.

1. THE LAND AND THE PEOPLES

Demography is always a good place to start. The latest censuses from the areas that interest us here—namely Northeast India, Bangladesh, Burma

(Myanmar), Thailand, Peninsular Malaysia, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Southwest China, and Taiwan—report over 100 million individuals living in the highlands and officially registered to one of what these governments call, each in its own way, their national minorities.

Table 1. Southeast Asian Massif, highland minorities per region.

Region	Total Population (N)	Total of Highland Minorities (N)	Highland Minorities by Region (%)	Highland Minorities in the SEAM (%)
Southwest China + Taiwan	495,057,080	60,775,378	12.27	60.2
Mainland Southeast Asia	252,644,049	27,392,382	10.84	27.1
Northeast India + Bangladesh	188,919,904	12,814,087	6.78	12.7
Southeast Asian Massif	--	100,981,847	10.78	100

Source: See tables in the dictionary for each individual region.

But even with something as official as census figures, determining precisely the number of ethnic groups living in any given area can be a tricky task. In the communist polities where ethnicity remains a sensitive political matter, the official numbers of highland minorities are 49 groups for Vietnam, 46 for Laos, and 30 for Southwest China. It is particularly helpful that these states have fixed these figures permanently and even embedded them in their constitutions. Counts are less precise in noncommunist polities. In Northeast India, this figure hovers around 220, while it is roughly a dozen in Bangladesh, used to be nine in Thailand until 2002, 12 in Cambodia, and maybe 20 in Burma. In Peninsular Malaysia and Taiwan, the status of aborigines and Orang Asli entail special rights, and these countries have established respectively state-sanctioned lists of 18 and 16 groups, respectively, entitled to these rights.

Should one, then, simply add these numbers to obtain a total of how many highland ethnic groups there are in the Massif? Unfortunately, no. The politics of naming in Asia mean that merely adding up these numbers can take us very far from the truth of the matter. For one, many transborder groups bear different names in different countries, and sometimes even within the same country. Then, if one were to apply criteria coherent with ethnolinguistic categorization, the number of distinct ethnicities in these highlands should rocket into the thousands. This magnitude was already documented half a century ago, when Frank Lebar et al. published their encyclopedic compendium *Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia*

(1964), still well worth reading today, and the predicament remains much the same now as it was then. The range of linguistic and cultural features in these highlands, combined with taxonomic inconsistencies and the incomplete state of scientific knowledge about these distinct societies, means that scholars will never be able to provide definitive figures on distinct ethnicities.

1.1. The Hazards of Naming

Statistical imprecision aside, we thus also face a taxonomic quandary. First of all, in countries sharing the Massif, highland peoples are generically called, in many languages, what can be translated into aborigines, mountain people, uplanders, tribes, hill tribes, mountain tribes, Scheduled Tribes, nations, nationalities, minorities, national minorities, and minority nationalities. This variability is not trivial. It reveals mind-sets that emphasize geographical remoteness (hills, highlands, mountains), premodern forms of social organization (tribes, aborigines), and lesser political clout (minorities), and this in itself is food for thought.

On the ground, across time, countries, and political regimes, unanimity has never been reached as to which ethnonyms (ethnic names) should be assigned to which groups, especially when they are found in more than one country. Historically, the states in the region have never concerned themselves much about accuracy on this front. As a consequence, most names used officially for the people living in the highlands of these 10 countries are exonyms, that is, names assigned by outsiders regardless of what the subjects themselves might prefer to be called. This constitutes a fine example of social classification performed as an act of dominance. Exonyms tell more about the preconceptions of the naming groups than the peoples being named (Grothmann 2012).

Besides the fact that subjects themselves do not get to choose their official names, a fundamental problem with exonyms is that they are most of the time misleading and in some cases outright derogatory. Take, for instance, highlanders in the southern Annam Range shared between Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia. They were long generically called *Moi*, “savages” of Kha, slaves, making clear to everyone their cultural subordination. In China the generic terms *Man*, *Miao*, and *Lolo* have also long been used with similar disparaging connotations (Culas and Michaud 2004), in addition to the fact that their writing in ideograms long involved the use of scorned animal radicals—snakes, cats, dogs.

Yet other issues are that exonyms are sometimes simply faulty (color of the dress or shape of a headdress), too broad (“cat people”), or applied to barely related societies or even the wrong people. In China, where naming has been

heavily politicized in the communist era, the multimillion Yi, Miao, Tujia, and Zhuang assemblages incorporate groups whose languages are often not mutually intelligible. They were pieced together for historico-political reasons other than actual cultural proximity. Subgroups could usefully be differentiated and acknowledged, but this would go against current state policy, which considers the *shaosu minzu* (minority nationalities) ordered once and for all. This convoluted situation in communist polities shows its logical limitations: China has 56 *minzu* for a national population of 1.3 billion, Vietnam has 54 *dân tộc* for its 90 million citizens, and Laos recognizes 49 *sonphao* among its 6 million. This strange arithmetic reveals that the foremost concern here was ideology, reiterating a hierarchy among the Red Brotherhood underlining the dominance of “elder siblings” (majorities) over the “younger” ones (minorities) (Evans and Rowley 1984; Michaud 2013). In Northeast India, while many exonyms preferred by British colonial administrators such as Naga are still in use today (Misra 1998), several groups have been allowed to adopt autonyms instead. For instance, the people called Mikir by the British are known as Karbi today. Moreover, the state accepts that the lists of Scheduled Tribes can be updated. Following Indian independence, many older subgroups and new cluster formations have therefore been given recognition. The predictable result in Northeast India, with a highland population of 12 million, is a proliferation of hundreds of autonyms leading to further fragmentation of groups, creating newer and ever smaller groups demanding official recognition. On a smaller scale, Taiwan faces a similar situation with groups such as the Truku and the Seediq, who have recently split from the Atayal.

There is no simple answer to the naming dilemma. Anthropologists and linguists generally favor autonyms, considering that autonyms are more suitable and more respectful than exonyms, and whenever possible they back the subjects’ will to discard old, if tenacious, exonyms. Popular examples of the successful switch to autonyms around the world include the Sioux now being called Lakota, the Eskimos called Inuit, Lapps called Saami, Gypsies called Romani, or Bushmen called San. As every human group on the planet has produced a name to call itself, this approach seems to have the potential to solve the problem—except for the unfortunate fact that autonyms exhibit a degree of multiplicity that scientific minds find unmanageable. The closer one gets to ground level, localisms prevail even from one hamlet to the next; clan names are sometimes swapped with group names; local topographical features may become part of a name; autonyms combine with exonyms people got used to; and disparities pop up even within the smallest of groups. Local pronunciation often drifts in ways that can sometimes prove perplexing to the outsider. And transcriptions into the roman alphabet can take strange

shapes: Is it the Khamu, the Khmmu, or the Keummeu? Are we talking about the Hani, the Ha Nhi, the Ikaw, or the Akha? Might the Man, Mun, Mien, Dao, Dzao, and Yao be one and the same? And what about the Meo, Méo, Meau, Meaw, Miao, Hmong, and Mông?

Great care is thus required when assigning and using highland ethnonyms—even autonyms—as disparities and localisms are far more prevalent than regularity and unity. Alleged definitive taxonomies, found not only on the Internet and in tourist compendiums but sadly also in some national-level official publications throughout the region, should be kept in check.

In light of these considerable challenges, producing this dictionary required a workable compromise between the ideal of scholarly rigor and the unruly reality. In Northeast India, Bangladesh, Thailand, Cambodia, Peninsular Malaysia, and Taiwan, we have included most of the major groups that are recognized linguistically or by autonyms. In most other areas, chiefly those controlled by authoritarian regimes, we have opted for initially accepting the ethnonym entries based on national lists in use in each country, while disambiguating as often as feasible by correcting obvious mistakes, indicating various spellings in use, proposing suitable alternatives, and cross-referencing a significant number of alternate names as they frequently occur just over the borders. In this way, for instance, a reader looking up the Ho will be redirected to the entry for Haw, which in turn proposes and explains the alternative Hoa, Hui, and Panthay ethnonyms.

1.2. “National Minority Groups” and “Peoples”

The deceptively simple notion of “national minority group” masks a few traps. First, a large proportion of ethnic groups in the Southeast Asian Massif are not national but in fact transnational. This means that they straddle borders. The Garo, Naga, Karen, Hani, Lolo, Hmong, Yao, Kachin, Khmu, Nùng, Tày, Dai, Katu, and Lamet—to name but a few—are each spread across two or more countries (Walker 1999; Bal 2007; Sturgeon 2007). Representatives of the Tai-Kadai linguistic family are arguably the most widely spread group of highland languages, with 35 million speakers scattered over seven of the ten countries sharing the Massif, not counting over 65 million Tai-speakers dwelling in lowland Laos and Thailand. Only when looking at a situation from within the borders of a single nation-state can the term *national minority* be seen as conceptually valid. With groups like the Hmong, numbering five million in Asia, roughly equivalent to the whole population of Laos, the notion of “minority” seems less than satisfactory. Finally, even the word *group* is contentious as it suggests a sense of community and social cohesion that far from all groups feel or share (Barth 1994).

Another question proves even more disconcerting: when they appear to present among themselves more differences than similarities, do highland societies dwelling in the Massif indeed form a “people,” the explicit object of this Rowman & Littlefield dictionary series? Or is a hypothetical social resemblance merely an illusion, hiding the fact that what they truly share, beyond the use of a common ecosystem, is *not being* part of the dominant lowland majorities that have ruled the region for centuries? As James Scott (2009) put it, is what links them together primarily a desire—a will? a strategy?—to stay away from lowland cultures, empires, and nation-states? The position in this dictionary is that these dozens of ethnic groups undoubtedly do not form one “people.” They constitute instead many peoples, a notion that, in this case, must not be defined strictly as a homogeneous, essential entity. Instead, what constitutes a “people” is fluid and constantly changing, adjusting to the fluctuating demands of history, ecology, modernity, and the market economy while attempting—with varying degrees of success—to preserve a cultural core of language, beliefs, rituals, world vision, economic practices, and other features (Michaud 2012).

Scholars have observed that what these peoples possibly share most is a sense of being different from the majorities (and from one another), a sense of geographical remoteness, and a state of marginality and sometimes domination, all of which is connected to a degree of cultural, political, and economic distance from Asia’s main seats of power. Geographical remoteness becomes a sign of political separation and subordination for those peoples who through history are most likely to have been classified by the powers-that-be as inferior, dangerous, “uncivilized,” “savage,” “barbarian,” or “raw.” In cultural terms, “peoples” here are truly plural and multiple, producing a cultural mosaic with contrasting colors rather than an integrated picture in harmonized shades.

Yet, from a distance—when “jumping scale” as van Schendel (2002) proposed—this mosaic can form a distinctive and relatable picture. As such, it becomes a legitimate subject for a “dictionary of peoples,” though certainly an unusual one.

2. GEOGRAPHY

The highland groups considered here tend to live in regions situated above roughly 300 meters in elevation, although this figure may vary significantly, especially when considering urban settings. The Massif covers approximately 2.5 million square kilometers, around the size of Western Europe. From west to east, it includes most of the Seven Sister States of northeastern India (the

southern uplands of Assam, south and east Arunachal Pradesh, southern and eastern Assam, most of Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, and the eastern part of Tripura), eastern Bangladesh, the eastern edge of Tibet, southern Sichuan, a section of Chongqing and Hubei, western Hunan, all of Guizhou and Yunnan, western and northern Guangxi, western Guangdong, the hinterlands of the islands of Hainan and Taiwan, the vast hills all around Burma's central plain, the north and west of Thailand along the border with Burma, central Peninsular Malaysia, all of Laos above the Mekong valley, central Vietnam along the Annam Cordillera plus the northern uplands surrounding the Red River delta, and the eastern fringe of Cambodia. Apart from the two islands and upland Malaya, it constitutes one immense unbroken Massif—a cluster of adjacent mountains and high valleys—but is a terrain of remarkable physical and climatic diversity. Its hydrology includes the temperate Yangtze/Chang Jiang river system that roughly demarcates its northern boundary, reaches the high, cold ranges extending southeast from the Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau, stretches across the monsoon high country drained by the Brahmaputra (as it is known in India, or the Tsang Po in Tibet, Siang in Arunachal, Luit in Assam, and Jamuna in Bangladesh), and encompasses the upper reaches of the Irrawaddy, Salween/Nu, Chao Phraya, Mekong/Lancang, Red River/Sông Hồng/Honghe, and Pearl River/Xi/Hsi/Zhu.

Northeast India was not explicitly included in the 2006 version of this dictionary, nor was eastern Bangladesh, despite both being physically contiguous and politically and culturally tied to the Southeast Asian Massif. We now amend this oversight. As for Peninsular Malaysia, specialists agree that though part of the Asian continent physically and politically, it is better associated in cultural, linguistic, and historical terms with the Malay world focused around Maritime Southeast Asia (Reid 1999; Tarling 2001; Lieberman 2003). However, a majority of the highlanders indigenous to its high hinterland, generically known as Orang Asli, “the original people,” are mostly Austroasiatic (Aslian) speakers and are thus covered in this edition. A final addition is Taiwan's uplands, where significant numbers of Austronesian speakers have been dwelling for thousands of years. Physically cut out of the bulk of the Massif like its little sister island, the Chinese province of Hainan Island, Taiwan is home to an indigenous population that this dictionary aims to include.

To the northwest of the Massif lie the Himalayas and Tibet, which are not part of the Massif. Despite its geographical continuity with the Massif's highlands, the Himalayas and Tibet are more appropriately conceived of as a distinct cultural entity with its own historical logic, encompassing the Tibetan plateau and a handful of small Himalayan kingdoms, northern Arunachal

Pradesh, and the ancient Kham polity covering parts of the Chinese provinces of Xinjiang, Qinghai, and Sichuan. Tibet has a long history as a centralized and religiously harmonized kingdom with a very ancient, sophisticated political structure (Shneiderman 2010). Though the physical highlands of China extend significantly north of the Yangtze and west of Yunnan and Sichuan, it can be considered that these are not part of the Southeast Asian Massif.

China's southwestern region forms a huge and complex assortment of mountain ranges, high plateaus, and valleys. It forms the geographic and demographic core of the Massif. The provinces of Yunnan and Guizhou, which the Massif encompasses completely, lie at its heart. As 60 percent of all indigenous inhabitants of the Southeast Asian Massif dwell in Southwest China, one might expect this area to garner a similar proportion of entries in this edition. However, the modern Chinese state project of simplifying ethnic distinctions within its borders hinders in-depth investigations of the region's ethnic makeup. Compared with much more intensively studied regions in Mainland Southeast Asia and Northeast India, reliable data and independent research can sometimes be difficult to come by (Harrell 1996). Due to a long history of dealing with the ever-increasing presence of a strongly centralized state, Southwest China often defies scholarly logic and its dynamic endogenous history is only partly acknowledged to date (Herman 2007; Swain 2002; Yang 2009) with complex political, religious, linguistic, economic, and biophysical particularities, which we do not claim to be able to fully address in detail in this work. Southwest China, in truth, might someday warrant its own historical dictionary.

3. LANGUAGES AND SCRIPTS

With group naming rules so variable, one might reasonably assume that linguistic classification could help to scientifically sort ethnicities into reliable categories. Although a degree of certainty exists as to how the bulk of the lowland majority groups should be categorized, definitive ethnolinguistic classification in the highlands is still a work in progress (Enfield and Comrie 2015). This uncertainty is linked to the large diversity of highland languages and dialects, numbering in the several hundreds and belonging to six major language families: Indo-European, Austronesian, Austroasiatic, Sino-Tibetan, Tai-Kadai, and Miao-Yao.

In Asia, the Indo-European group includes the huge Indic family, which boasts the largest number of speakers on the Indian subcontinent. The Bengali-Assamese subfamily of Indic encroaches on the Massif in the extreme northeast of India and in eastern Bangladesh. The Austronesian

family originates from Taiwan Island (formerly Formosa) where aborigines still belong to it, and from there, spread through the Philippines to cover all of Maritime Southeast Asian and Oceanian languages as well as a few spots in the southern Annam Range and in Peninsular Malaysia. The Austroasiatic family includes Vietnamese and Khmer, the majority languages in Vietnam and Cambodia, as well as vernaculars in the highlands of eastern Burma, Laos, central Vietnam, the Aslian family in Peninsular Malaysia, and some isolated areas of Northeast India. The large Sino-Tibetan family encompasses the massive Sinitic branch of Chinese languages; it also encompasses the Tibeto-Burman subfamily, which as its name indicates includes the national languages of Tibet and Burma, and spreads through most of northeastern India and its borderlands with Burma, making it the dominant family on the western edge of the Massif. In addition to the national majorities in Thailand and Laos, the Tai-Kadai family incorporates languages spoken all over the central part of the Massif from Assam to Hainan, with the bulk of them in Guangxi. Finally, the Miao-Yao (Hmong-Mien) family, the smallest in terms of numbers and area, is rather specific to the highlands of western Guizhou, Yunnan, and the northern Southeast Asian Peninsula. It is the only language family in the Massif that does not include one of the national majority languages.

It must be kept in mind that this sixfold classification is still hotly debated among linguists. Proto-languages, the presumed common stems for each family, continue to be explored and reconstructed. As a consequence, some languages are converging, others are moving apart, and as new evidence becomes available languages are being shifted between families or even reclassified as subfamilies in and of themselves. In this sense, linguistics also has its pitfalls, yielding classifications not much more certain than ethnic taxonomy. Yet, for all its imperfections, historical and field-based ethnolinguistic remains one of the safest structural elements in clustering ethnic identities. It underpins the divisions used in this dictionary.

The 10 countries covered here all have different national languages sporting varying and mutually unintelligible scripts, with the possible exception of the related Thai and Lao scripts. This lack of homogeneity is compounded by the more or less active existence of numerous other vernacular scripts within each country and sometimes across borders. Some of these originated in the highlands and are often ideographic or borrowed from Chinese. Others, such as Black Thai on the Laos–Vietnam border, are chiefly alphabetical while some derive from Indian, European, or Arabic influence (Jawi in Malaysia, for instance).

Only a handful of highland groups have ever produced endogenous scripts. The ideographic systems of Yi and Naxi groups in Yunnan and Sichuan, for example, are entirely indigenous and have been used to record religious

texts and political agreements. Ideograms, pictographs that have developed a degree of abstraction, were borrowed from the Han Chinese by the Yao to register their genealogies in vibrant codices and by the Zhuang to create their own *sawndip* script (Kaup 2000). In Northeast India, the Indic scripts used to write Assamese/Bengali and Hindi have been in circulation in the highlands for centuries. The Tai groups in the Sip Song Chau Tai, in northern Vietnam, used variations on the Pali-based essentially Indic alphabetical script used by the Siamese to write occasional annals, as did some of their Tai-speaking neighbors in upland Laos.

Such intricacy, plus the fact that many of these scripts do not exist as computer fonts, precludes the use of vernacular writing systems in entries that might ideally entail their use.

4. HISTORY AND SOURCES

In spite of its remoteness, the Southeast Asian Massif is a palimpsest of human occupation. Ongoing archaeological research has documented early living sites and lithic industries going back millennia. During the second half of the first millennium BCE and the first millennium CE, the Dian Kingdom rose in Yunnan. Viet, Tai, and Burman migrants followed land routes from the north and crossed the Massif before establishing their own kingdoms around the Khmer, Mon, and Cham already settled in the fertile and hospitable lowlands of Mainland Southeast Asia (Higham 1989, Yao 2016).

The Massif's high reaches were then only sparsely populated and mainly on Southwest China's high fertile lands. But in the clashes following intense intergroup contact, the new and better organized forces eliminated, displaced, or assimilated a number of their predecessors such as the Rhade, Jarai, Muong, and indigenous groups in Peninsular Malaysia, Hainan, and the Taiwan uplands. It is unclear (and perhaps unknowable) whether the first populations to settle in the Massif did so willingly or due to lowland demographic pressures and political adversity, as proposed by James C. Scott (2009). Whether these first inhabitants were indigenous to other parts of the Massif also remains unclear, as peripheral populations often left little evidence in terms of long-lasting architecture or artifacts.

Over time, kingdoms and empires made their mark on the fertile lowland coasts, deltas, and floodplains surrounding the Massif, establishing lasting political supremacy in territories that, for many, still prevail to this day. The Han ruled in Southwest China and eventually Taiwan; the Tibetans reigned on and around the Tibetan plateau; the Ahom and Assamese controlled the Brahmaputra valley; the Viet (Kinh) ran northern Vietnam, who went on to

snatch southern Vietnam from the Cham and the Khmer; the Khmer left a lasting mark on Cambodia; the Tai settled for good in Siam and northern Laos; the Burman ruled Burma (Myanmar); and the Malay reigned over Malaya. In the process, remnants of earlier groups who did not get entirely absorbed by the conquerors had to move to the comparatively empty highlands.

In Southwest China, more numerous and politically formalized groups sometimes stood their ground successfully, firmly establishing distinct polities such as the Dai, Bai, Naxi, Yi, Dong, and Zhuang fiefdoms in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Guangxi (Herman 2007; Yang 2009). Thus, in China, several aboriginal societies that had predated massive immigration from the lowlands live on today, while others who were not absorbed by this human wave simply moved away. Northeast India has long hosted indigenous groups, many of whom have now been pushed to the foothills. Migrations from both the east and the west into the thinly populated fertile valleys of the region have been occurring for centuries. Hindu priests and scholars, for instance, came to settle from the Indian heartland at the invitation of local kings starting in the 4th century CE. Until the Ahom migrated to the area from Upper Burma around the 13th century, the region was divided into small kingdoms in both the valleys and the hills (Gait 2003/1906). The establishment and expansion of the Ahom kingdom, the rise of Assamese influence in the Brahmaputra valley, and a similar push by Bengali settlers, especially Hindu Bengalis who came in from East Pakistan at the time of the partition of British India, made the indigenous population of the present-day northeastern Indian state of Tripura a minority in their own homeland, though Tibeto-Burman-speaking Tripuri kings had ruled the area for centuries.

It is generally agreed that most of the current inhabitants of Mainland Southeast Asia's highlands are relatively recent migrants from north and east of the current Chinese border (Hall 1981). The spread of the Han into the southwestern highlands of the Middle Kingdom, accelerated by the introduction from the Americas of maize and potato suited to the temperate climate of the hinterland, brought the Chinese into contact with some of the groups who had been living there and others who had sought upland refuge from subordination, assimilation, or annihilation. Eventually, Han occupation of virtually all of the surrounding fertile valleys meant that the only remaining uninhabited zones open to migrants were situated higher up or farther south and west toward the fringes of the Massif. Starting roughly 500 years ago and peaking in the major political turmoil of the 18th and 19th centuries, small waves of mountain dwellers pushed from Southwest China into the highlands of western and southern Yunnan and the northern parts of Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam; such groups presently comprise a significant portion of the total highland population.

Indigenous groups living in the hilly region of Northeast India, now the frontier between India and Burma, moved about freely in the area until the creation of these nation-states. Thus historically, the hills of Nagaland, Mizoram, and Manipur probably received more migrants coming from the east than from the subcontinent, connecting their cultural heritage to that of Burma, Tibet, and western Yunnan rather than the Bengali or the Assamese. However, it was with the British colonization that large movements of labor from outside reached these uplands (chiefly for plantation work), a movement accelerating in recent decades due to demographic pressure and severe environmental issues in nearby Bangladesh (Sarma 2015).

Even a rapid review of highland minorities' migrations in the region would not be complete without a mention of recent waves, in the second half of the 20th century, that have taken highlanders outside Asia. The communist revolutionary wars and the First and Second Indochina Wars threw several hundred thousands of them to destinations like the United States, France, Australia, and Canada. These diasporic migrations outside Asia, however, are not covered in this dictionary.

A basic principle of archaeology is that the longer human groups have been dwelling in a given location, the more material evidence they are likely to have left behind. But as a rule, the Massif was inhabited on a regular basis significantly later than the coastal areas and large river deltas surrounding it.

Archaeological research by transnational teams of scientists is beginning to reveal a great deal about the complexity and interlinkages of livelihood strategies and trade routes in the prehistory of the Massif. In the 20th century, a lack of research resources due to warfare and political and ideological constraints led to conclusions that there was little to be found in ancient highland residential sites. Data encoded in stone and ceramic fragments, petroglyphs, megaliths, food remains, refuse pits, house sites, burial goods, and skeletal remains are starting to tell more nuanced stories. This recent archaeological record shows evidence of very early Stone Age human habitation by hunting and gathering groups, the development of more complex Neolithic societies with refined stone tools, pottery, and the domestication of plants and animals, and the rise of Bronze and Iron Age polities such as the Dian Kingdom (4th century–109 BCE) in Central Yunnan, China (Yao 2016). However, whether prehistoric peoples in the Massif are the ancestors of today's ethnic minorities or indigenous peoples remains to be demonstrated. As more research is conducted, more archaeological evidence will come to light.

But we do know that in the Common Era, the Ahom of Northeast India ruled Assam for six centuries (c. 1228–1826) and left a tangible material heritage. Other feudal polities that produced lasting artifacts include the Shan

in eastern Burma, the Naxi of the Lijiang region, the Bai around Erhai Lake, the Yi in central Yunnan, the Lue of the Sip Song Panna (Xishuangbanna), and the Zhuang, Kam, and Tujia of Guangxi and Guizhou. These groups built at least some of their dwellings out of lasting materials; erected steles, temples, and pagodas; and carved visible changes in the landscape such as rice terraces and sizable waterworks. But elsewhere, the picture is blurred. Particularly in the uplands of Mainland Southeast Asia, where many nomadic or seminomadic upland migrants failed to sedentarize until fairly late in the modern era, impermanent dwellings made of ligneous materials were the norm. These peoples created their clothes from natural fibers such as hemp, and their shallow graves, often small and unmarked, have faded away. Animism, the original and still widespread indigenous religious system, did not necessitate the erection of lasting buildings of worship. Body ornaments, the occasional grinding stone, and, more recently, metal tools comprise just about all that the ancestors of these groups have left behind. Even their signatures in the landscape—swiddens, foot and horse paths, village sites, fire pits, lithic fish traps, graveyards—have been largely reclaimed by forests or erased by subsequent occupancy. In contrast with the wealth of baked brick and stone buildings, thick foundations, canals, temples, cities, and citadels left by the more complex surrounding civilizations, archaeological remains are comparatively scant in the higher reaches of the Massif.

When material evidence is sparse, historians may turn to texts. But here again, evidence is lacking in comparison with lowland civilizations. Apart from a few exceptions mentioned above, most highland groups historically lacked writing systems and thus have not produced archives. For a surprising number of them, it was only when Christian missionaries from the West came into regular contact with local groups in the 19th and early 20th centuries, bringing with them romanized and syllabic alphabets used to translate the Bible, that most of the Massif's languages were for the first time put to paper (Salemink 2003). One such example is the Pollard script (Pollard 1905), a syllabic assemblage designed by the eponymous British missionary that became popular among certain Miao groups in China. Barney and Smalley's Romanized Popular Alphabet for Hmong in Laos is now widely used by the Hmong diaspora. In the second half of the 20th century, most governments around the Massif pursued and completed the process of fixing standard national writing systems for the most important minority languages; many of these later scripts, however, promulgated from above, never convincingly took root among highland populations. But in short, up to very recently, most highlanders in the Massif wrote virtually nothing about themselves and their auto-history—or as historians would have it, their microhistory (Brooks, DeCorse, and Walton 2008).

Still, their literate lowland neighbors were more prolific. Chinese, Bengali, Ahom, Manipuri, Burmese, Vietnamese, Thai, Khmer, Lao, and Malay official annals yield information on the identities, cultures, and whereabouts of numerous highland groups at the immediate peripheries of lowland domains. Historians can gather information from administrative reports filed by itinerant officials and traders or by military officers leading sorties sent to raid or pacify the uplands, such as in Ma Touan Lin's 13th century *Wen hsien t'ong k'ao* (Comprehensive Study of Civilization). These reports routinely contain a few entertaining lines on “barbarians” met on such journeys and expeditions. Rampant bigotry in the shape of a forceful discourse of exclusion unfavorably comparing the “savage” to the civilized self substantially thins the value of these texts. Nevertheless, though imprecise and distorted, the information from lowland texts can be of value when carefully deciphered (for instance, Deal and Hostetler 2006).

With European observers penetrating the Massif in greater numbers around the mid-19th century, texts of a more rigorously ethnographic nature increased. Until after World War II and the end of European colonial rule in the region, “incidental” ethnographers (Michaud 2007) included a variety of Western missionaries and explorers in Southwest China (Glover et al. 2011) and Thailand; British officials in India, Burma, and Malaya; and French envoys in French Indochina. All of them documented elements of oral history, festooned with their own Eurocentric observations and remarks. Hundreds of such reports can be consulted in archives and colonial journals around the world; they often included photographs, drawings, and hand-made and ordinance maps (Michaud 2013).

Thereafter, except in times of war or moments of political suspicion, ethnological, linguistic, and historical research has only grown. Today, as this dictionary's bibliography testifies, a host of international scholars release new publications every week on one or another of the highland groups. Scholars around the world are now combining Asian annals, colonial archives, and modern scientific works with fresh field studies to support their investigations and publications (such as Sadan 2013; Pachua 2014; Endicott 2015).

It is worth bearing in mind that the notion of text can also include oral literature. Oral tradition is rich and lively in the Massif and can be mined for historical evidence, though great care must be exercised when interpreting such sources. Myths, one classic form of oral tradition, often embed enticing information on the creation of the world, the appearance of humans, or the distinctions between male and female as seen from within a given culture. However, poetic license is routinely granted to storytellers, and myths cannot generally be ascribed as historical fact. Unlike mythology, oral history can

show a good degree of reliability (Vansina 1985). It is composed of events set in the memory of living elders who can testify to their veracity. When collected with care and cross-checked for inaccuracies and distortions, oral history yields valuable information not only on what research subjects have experienced firsthand but also on stories passed down through generations, though in such cases additional validation is necessary. When no archaeological evidence exists to confirm, for example, the point in history that a nomadic group may have entered a region for the first time, and when local written records are mute or nonexistent, oral history can provide initial clues on which to base future investigation (Tonkin 1975).

5. RELIGIONS

The many beliefs and rituals in the highlands bear witness to a collection of distinct cosmologies and unique syncretic blends. The region's religions range from early animism, shamanism, ancestor worship, and geomancy to local forms of syncretism incorporating philosophies such as Confucianism and Taoism as well as world religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Such diversity cannot be addressed in detail here, so we draw instead a broad portrait of how religion has manifested itself among highland groups in the recent past as well as the present day.

Reliable figures on religion are very hard to come by as many national censuses do not collect this information—or when they do, animism is not always acknowledged. But we know from a variety of sources that a fair proportion of Southeast Asian Massif highland societies do not follow any of the four dominant world religions mentioned above—and of those who do, a large majority actually practice localized syncretic versions.

Many highland societies continue to practice what anthropologists generically call animism. The notion of animism is a broad and convenient umbrella covering the variety of original religious systems based on the veneration of elements of nature that have been present in all human societies at some point in their history. The term *animism* refers to the assignment of a soul (*anima*) and a degree of agency to objects or natural phenomena (Bird-David 1999). More precisely, it denotes a world of freely roaming benevolent and malicious spirits, often ghosts of deceased ancestors, that need to be actively dealt with, appeased, and courted for their influence on life events: neonatal health, beneficial house location and shape, desirable agriculture, food availability, migration patterns, and burials, for instance. Winning over these otherworldly spirits to cure illnesses, defeat bad luck, or negotiate a

better living requires a range of intercessors, both men and women, who are usually locally called “spirit doctors” or, more commonly in the West, sorcerers, priests, or shamans (Eliade 2004).

No so-called pure forms of animism exist today in these highlands, with total isolation a thing of the past—if, indeed, it ever existed. Through time, migration toward and contact with neighboring and competing belief systems and practices altered original forms of religious beliefs and their accompanying rituals. External systems expanded into the Massif. Waves of contact were made with Confucianism, Taoism, and Mahayana Buddhism in China, Taiwan, and Vietnam; Hinduism in Northeast India, western Burma, western Bangladesh, and around the ancient Khmer and Cham kingdoms of the lower Mekong basin; Theravada Buddhism in Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia; and Islam in Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Southwest China via migrating Hui Muslim merchants and craftspeople. Starting in the 16th century, European missionaries, troops, and colonists brought several forms of Christianity used as a political wedge to ease conquest. Such colonial divide-and-rule strategies still to this day set Christianized highland groups in Northeast India, Burma, Vietnam, Malaya, and Taiwan apart from the overwhelmingly non-Christian lowland majorities. Indeed, this religious distinction between highlanders and national majorities is one of today’s most enduring sources of ill feeling in the Massif (Pachau 2014).

Pressures to convert to the national religions in the highlands are still present, perhaps more forcefully than ever before. Hinduism is promoted in India’s Northeast as a (nationalist) measure to integrate “tribes” into mainstream Indian society and fight the spread of Christianity and Islam in the region. Theravada Buddhism is actively encouraged as a civilizing factor in Mainland Southeast Asia, as is Mahayana Buddhism in Vietnam, Taiwan, and China. Malaysia’s official religion is Islam and that fact is reflected all the way up the peninsula’s highlands. Active Christianization is supported by seemingly bottomless funding from the West. The on-the-ground consequences of these religious clashes can be perplexing. The Kachin number roughly one million in total but are divided between three countries. Kachin living in northern Burma were Christianized by the British in the 19th century (Imamura 2014). Meanwhile, Kachin populations to the east in adjacent Yunnan, called there Jingpo, have retained their animist religious system, while their brethren to the northwest, in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, called the Singpho, are predominantly Theravada Buddhists—all of which point to the fact that religion and identity can diverge drastically (Sadan 2013). Similar cases pepper the entire Massif, making the religious mapping of the region a very complex affair.

Highland groups keep alive many animistic practices, notably in mediating their relationships with nature. Generally speaking (with the possible exception of modern China due to collectivization in the 1950s and the Cultural Revolution of 1966–1976), highland groups in the Massif still perceive themselves as being a part of nature, embedded in it, as opposed to being “enviored” by it, as in the modern notion of environment (Harrell 2002; Forsyth and Walker 2008). Countless forms of ritual underscore the place of humans within nature: rites for selecting village sites and rice fields that involve reassuring and compensating local soil spirits; prohibitions against cutting down forests along watercourses that are inhabited by friendly ghosts and against killing certain trees that contain souls; prayers and offerings before and after slaughter to pacify animal spirits; and shamanistic cavalcades to the outer world to visit ghosts and convince them to put an end to bad harvests, soil depletion, famine, or illness.

It has been observed that often such apparently religious practices actually embed practical wisdom, such as enforcing a certain minimum length of time for fallows or forbidding ecologically unwise tree felling at certain times of year (Leepreecha 2004; Vuong 2004). Now existing alongside modern agronomy and forestry—made over as “indigenous knowledge”—these beliefs actually represent years of intimate and, more often than not, balanced interactions with nature. It has been demonstrated that before cash cropping became the norm in the Massif, the ancient and common practice of swiddening in small settlements had proved to be highly sustainable over the long term (Boulbet 1975; Kunstadter, Chapman, and Sanga 1978). It is only with the intensification of agriculture, the imposition of monocultures and plantations, and increased population pressure that forests started to severely shrink below sustainable thresholds, breaking the previous ecological balance (de Koninck 2000; Karlsson 2012). Highland development initiatives have thus begun to actively reassess the value of local knowledge and recognize highlanders as competent custodians of the forests and ecosystems they have inhabited for centuries (Forsyth and Walker 2008; Cairns 2015).

6. CUSTOMARY SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The rapid pace of global modernization has subjected these groups to drastically different pressures than the ones that had previously shaped their societies. To better appreciate the distinctiveness of highland societies and the unique factors that have affected their adaptation to modernity, it helps to reconstruct how they might have appeared to the outside world at the time of European colonization, roughly one to two centuries ago.

6.1. Ancient Feudal Groups

Societies of the Southeast Asian Massif that occupied areas above the lowlands but below the highest, most isolated mountains were in fairly regular contact with the lowland powers and their markets. Either through diffusionism from lowland cores or spontaneously, these midland groups adopted feudal, hierarchical social organizations. At the time of European contact, a section of the Assamese under the Ahom of Northeast India had been highly differentiated between a dominant elite controlling the land and means of production and the peasants laboring for them. In Yunnan, the Naxi, Bai, and Yi operated along the same pattern after the Nanzhao Kingdom had flourished and fallen by the 13th century. In the Daliangshan Mountains of Sichuan, the Nuosu Yi had a complex slave-owning caste system. The Tujia and Dong in Guizhou as well as the Zhuang in Guangxi had also set up polities of a feudal nature. Today, the descendants of these feudal groups include the largest ethnic groups in the highlands and constitute the majority of the Massif's indigenous population. It should be noted that all these examples challenge James C. Scott's (2009) blanket claim that the inhabitants of Zomia had fundamentally rejected "the state" as a model for their own political structures (Lieberman 2010).

6.2. Acephalous Groups

In the mountains above these midland fiefdoms and in isolated pockets on their peripheries, European colonial observers found a mosaic of what they called tribes scattered through a sort of archipelago of mountaintops where lowland powers rarely ventured and midland feudal lords had not systematically planted their own peasants (Vial 1898; Lunet de Lajonquière 1906; Pollard 1919; Gilhodes 1996/1922; Savina 1930/1924). The social organization of these groups was based primarily on kinship, and their political formalization was determined by and limited to blood ties. These groups dispensed with a centralized form of political authority and were therefore stateless—and here Scott was right. This humble form of political structure, observed throughout the world, is known as "acephalous," meaning without a head. In the Massif, examples of such groups include the Boro, Naga, Drung, Hmong, Lahu, Karen, Yao, Lisu, Akha, Khmu, Rhade, Jorai, Katu, Talieng, Seediq, Truku, Semai, Jakun, and many more.

Social ties among kinship-based groups were most commonly based on lineage (the known genealogy) or clan (the known and assumed genealogy as expressed in a common surname). They exhibited a fully integrated organization, meaning that political, economic, and religious matters were

not differentiated and were in constant interplay in all matters of daily life. As sociologist Max Weber famously proposed, these groups had not yet experienced the “disenchantment” of their world (Jenkins 2000).

In cultural terms, nearly all feudal societies belonged to the Tai and Tibeto-Burman language families, while practically all the Austronesian, Mon-Khmer, Miao-Yao, and a good portion of the Tibeto-Burman groups were acephalous. However, exceptions to this general observation and “in-between” situations occurred. For instance, in the southern Annam Cordillera, several Mon-Khmer and Austronesian groups had developed local chiefdoms more complex than purely acephalous groups though still less hierarchical than fully feudal polities.

6.3 Livelihood Practices

Social structures also impacted local livelihoods. At the time of European contact, the upland economy was also structured socially along the lines of feudality or acephality. The three-way division between the lowlands, midlands, and highlands geographically defined the distance between civilizational cores, peripheries, and distant fringes (van Schendel 2002; Scott 2009).

The economic aspects of feudalism across time and space are well known (see Roseberry 1989; Cancian 1989): an elite in control of the land and agricultural surpluses activated forms of coercion to extract wealth from the labor of the peasantry, providing access to land as tenants/farmers and a degree of personal, economic, and political security in return. Outside the strict perimeter of the feudal polity, trade relationships and elaborate exchange systems with surrounding polities allowed elites to use surpluses to derive further profits. Tribute could also be extorted from weaker neighbors forced to pay a price to safeguard their political liberty; conversely, tribute also had to be paid to more powerful overlords.

In economic terms, acephalous societies participated in one of three possible systems: hunting-gathering, horticulture, or a simple “prefeudal” form of peasantry. In all cases, the household—a group of individuals linked by blood or alliance and living under the same roof—was the fundamental economic and ritual unit. Subsistence agriculture took care of households’ immediate needs, while indispensable commodities that could not be grown, gathered, or produced locally were procured on the market.

Hunter-gatherers, such as the Maram Naga of Northeast India or the Mlabri of Thailand and Laos, lived in small nomadic bands of no more than a few dozen individuals and only took from nature what it provided. Horticulturalists, on the other hand, constituted the bulk of the acephalous groups, with the ubiquitous practice of swiddening comprising the main form

of food production. The most aggressive and damaging form of this particular agriculture, pioneering swiddening, utilized very short fallows or none at all and was limited to actively nomadic groups or those heavily involved in growing land-exhausting crops such as the opium poppy. Rotational swiddening, with long fallows, was a more finely balanced activity with little long-term impact on the environment and was practiced by groups willing to settle for longer periods of time in a given vicinity, such as most groups in Vietnam's Central Highlands. Early forms of peasantry chiefly affected groups closer to the feudal clusters and indicated a gradual attraction toward these strong cores, falling just short of becoming part of them. The Kachin/Jingpo/Singpho on the India–Burma–China border, in the orbit of the feudal Shan, famously studied by British anthropologist Edmund Leach (1954), offered a telling example of this balancing act.

Far from living in autarchy and operating separately, highlands, midlands, and lowlands were tied together through elaborate trade networks. Different ecological niches and variations in their degrees of industrialization, diffused chiefly from the lowlands, ensured that inhabitants from each tier could provide specialized produce, goods, and services. Goods that were gathered, hunted, or grown in the high and middle regions (rare timber, in particular coffin wood, medicinal plants, game, and various parts of animals considered essential in the Chinese, Indian, Thai, or Vietnamese pharmacopeias) were traded for indispensable processed goods common in the lowlands but often lacking in the highlands (cloth, precious metals, tools, salt, petrol, firearms, and gunpowder). Midland groups could sell their rice, fruit, clothes, and jewelry to those living below or above them and could make available troops and excess labor to lowland powers within the framework of tributary relations. Midland groups were also in a position to extort similar privileges from the less functionally organized peoples dwelling in the upper reaches and on the fringes of their domains. The feudal groups in between, regulating the trail and river systems, profitably acted as middlemen in this bidirectional circulation as documented by Le Failler (2014) in a detailed historical description of this process in and around the Thái polity in northwestern Vietnam.

7. RELATIONSHIP TO THE LOWLANDS AND THE STATE THEN AND NOW

Historically, political relationships between highland and lowland societies have been complex and often strained (Poisson 2009). As mentioned earlier, before European colonization and the advent of national territories bounded by modern and secured borders, the highlands and their inhabitants were of

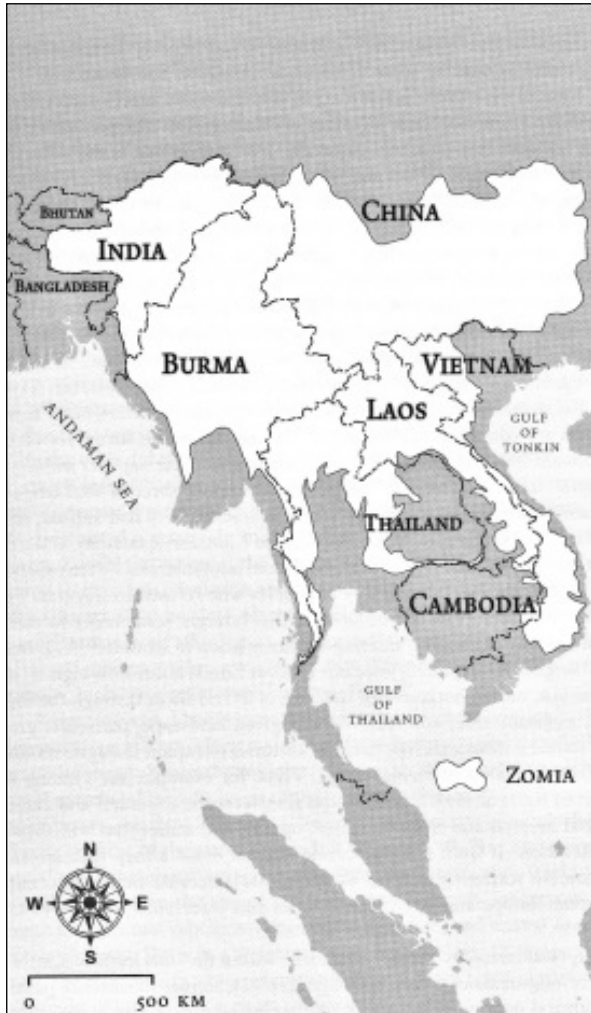
limited interest to lowland rulers. Politically as much as economically, these fringes acted as mere buffer zones (Winichakul 1994; Lieberman 2003). Unless some precise geostrategic factor came into play (mining, invasion corridors), keeping marginal inhabitants in check through distant tributary relationships was usually considered a better strategy than conquering and then having to police barbarian marches, a costly operation.

Such was the situation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts on the joint fringes of India, Burma, and Bangladesh; in the Kam and the Naxi domains shielding China from Tibet; in the Sip Song Panna, Kachin, and Shan States buffering between China, Laos, and Burma; in the Sip Song Chau Tai separating northern Vietnam and Laos; and in the “Montagnard” domain between Vietnam and Cambodia. China, after the 16th century, would become the first lowland power to actually invade and permanently occupy such highland peripheries (Herman 2007; Yang 2009; Lieberman 2010). This happened increasingly as expanding farming made the acquisition of land necessary. Times of local upheaval—such as Southwest China’s Taiping, Miao, and Panthai Rebellions in the 19th century—were triggered at least in part by migrations of Han settlers from the plains to fertile high valleys in the southwest combined with the increased presence of the Han state on its southern frontier—complete with ruthless domination and relentless taxation.

7.1. The Zomia Hypothesis: Up until the Early 20th Century



Van Schendel’s Zomia (2002 and 2007)



Scott's Zomia (2009)

Had the Massif, then, been a zone of refuge? James C. Scott's *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (2009) was the first scholarly attempt to theorize the remoteness—which Scott calls the “friction of terrain”—of the Massif and its inhabitants’ defiance of the state as self-styled “barbarians by design.”

As mentioned earlier, Scott elected to call the region Zomia from a neologism coined by Willem van Schendel (2002). Originally, as in figure 1, van Schendel's Zomia included the whole of the Himalayas and their

peripheries. Scott focused instead on the Southeast Asian Massif, calling it Zomia. This naming business has led to a degree of confusion as to what the notion of Zomia should encompass (see Michaud 2010 for disambiguation). The substance of Scott's nonstate thesis is that over the course of centuries, the uplands of the Massif were populated by groups fleeing lowland domination. He proposed that these "runaways," as he calls them, wanted to ensure that the very notion of "the state" did not take root within their own societies. Zomia thus became a major "zone of refuge" from domination, a "shatter zone" where populations practiced forms of "nonconfiscatable" "escape agriculture" like growing root crops on swiddens or under the forest canopy. The aim was to avoid being detected and ultimately "being governed." Scott also suggested that many highland societies' lack of indigenous writing systems may have comprised an effective stealth tactic.

But with "the state" encroaching on the highlands from every direction, Scott believes that over the past two centuries, Zomia gradually underwent "the last great enclosure" this planet has known. Roughly since World War II, he estimates, his theory of flight and avoidance has ceased to apply to the Massif as lowland governments relentlessly expand "distance demolishing technologies" and crack down on defiance to their state projects (Scott 2009, introduction).

Scott's thesis has certainly shed light on creative forms of resistance and resilience by highland populations throughout history and up to the present day. Some of his generalizations, however, warrant healthy skepticism (Lieberman 2010). As this dictionary abundantly demonstrates, states have actually operated successfully in the Massif for centuries. Various endogenous feudal states and kingdoms blossomed in the uplands. Scott, whose historical data stems primarily from Burma, omits these. He also argues that highland groups specifically rejected keeping written records, preferring oral histories that could keep knowledge hidden from prying eyes. But as we saw, endogenous scripts have flourished among some of the groups in the Massif, pictographic writing systems emerged, and lowland scripts were borrowed and adapted to local needs.

But despite its flaws, Scott's theory remains appealing, engaging, and highly original. As with van Schendel's 2002 proposition, it offers a dramatic change in scale that shows the ground from high above, revealing a picture rarely seen before. It is the fruition of years of serious thinking by a scholar unapologetically sympathetic to the plight of the dominated populations of the Massif and a testimony to their political savvy. As historian Victor Lieberman (2010, 336) has fittingly summarized: "Scott's central achievement, then, is to bring hill peoples into the mainstream of regional history by uncovering their relation to lowland states and societies. . . . Scott has rescued hill peoples

from assumptions of stasis, primitivism, essentialism, and isolation. He has given them voice, agency, and rationality.”

7.2. Facing the State in the 20th Century

James C. Scott insists that his thesis of escape to the highlands should not be considered valid past the first half of the 20th century, when the state definitively reined in the uplands that had so far escaped its hand. The state won, Scott declares, and the process of enclosure—in the sense of surrounding and shepherding peoples into mainstream society rather than the Marxist sense of fencing off space to empty it of its original inhabitants and profit elites—was made complete.

However, this pronouncement demands more nuance. Over the 20th century, official national positions toward mid- and highlanders in the Massif have varied between countries. The paternalistic positions taken by socialist regimes (China, Vietnam, and Laos) contrast with the more pragmatic ones taken by capitalist regimes (most others, including during the European colonial era).

During revolutionary times and their accompanying wars—that is, roughly between 1910 and 1975—communist ideology in the Massif was influenced by the dominant position of the Soviet Union. Josef Stalin had outlined the principle as early as 1913 that everyone was to be of equal legal status within a socialist republic. Underlying this ostensibly inclusive and amicable rhetoric was the need for socialist forces to win the allegiance of the largest possible amount of the peasantry and labor force during struggles of independence and revolution in China, Vietnam, and Laos and also during colonial times in British India and Burma when highland societies’ historical antagonism with the old lowland powers was actively fanned. This strategy was largely responsible for assurances made during the early years of the struggle that routinely promised highland groups the right to unilaterally declare full cultural, political, and territorial independence once the colonists had departed (Michaud 2009).

With the revolutionary and independence wars over, however, virtually all promises for minority self-rule were forgotten or at best replaced with watered-down substitutes that gave priority to a single nation ruling over an indivisible national territory. The change of tone can be detected in the policies and attitudes of the Indian state before and after independence in response to Naga demands for autonomy. It also happened in China, Vietnam, and Laos, where the new socialist states backtracked on their early promises and instead, “supported” highlanders’ efforts to “catch up” with the enlightened industrial socialist masses by joining the proletariat working in

mines, dams, and factories, complete with matching educational and health services. On the bright side, all national minorities were granted full-fledged national citizenship; but this status entailed that in return for the help bestowed on them by their “big brothers,” the “little brothers” were to “progress” by leaving behind their “backward” ways and behaving like modern socialist subjects (Viet 1968). Cultural, religious, economic, and especially political distinctions in the highlands were only to be tolerated if these did not impede integration into the socialist nation—in other words, not very often (Nguyen 1968; Evans 1985).

In Vietnam, this policy was creatively labeled “selective cultural preservation” (Nong 1978; Salemink 2000). This astute socialist project, also shared by China, Laos, and authoritarian regimes, boils down to the encouragement of minorities’ cultural, economic, and political absorption into the majority while allowing benign cultural expressions to persist in set formats. These include house architecture and clothing as well as dance and music expressed during annual “minority culture days” and festivals (Mueggler 2002). Such “culture” may be made public through vectors like “traditional” villages frozen in time and humming with songs and dances formatted for tourist consumption, as well as sanitized representations in ethnological museums and on postage stamps (Oakes 1998; Walsh and Swain 2004; Nyiri 2006). The end result promotes only the picturesque and inoffensive—rebranded “intangible cultural heritage” (Salemink 2001; Goudineau 2003)—as a token contribution to national ethnic variety, forming the basis of a thriving domestic ethnic tourism industry.

Under 20th century more liberal regimes, on the other hand, highlanders have been in a markedly weaker legal position, with some even lacking national citizenship. Such is the case in Thailand, where around half of the adult members of “hill tribes” have been refused official recognition despite most of their lineages having lived on their land for several generations (Toyota 2005). In Bangladesh, where poverty is a huge national concern and the non-Bengali minority population remains proportionally minuscule, deliberate attempts to settle Bengali Muslims in the minority-dominated highlands and to use tough repressive measures against the non-Muslim minorities are still being reported (Roy 2012). In Cambodia, a nation still in a state of political and economic uncertainty, the state can simply not afford to pay much attention to the minute numbers of highland groups and their particular needs (Bourdier 2015). Malaysia and Taiwan now show good intentions but believe more in national modernity for all than in cultural exceptionalism (Simon 2006; Gomes 2007). In Burma (Myanmar), armed confrontation and repression remain the core policy of the military and there is little hope for a permanent and satisfactory solution any time soon, as

illustrated by the flow of Karen and Rohingya refugees fleeing the country (Horstmann 2011). In India, national policy makers have shown indifference and a lack of sensitivity toward the special problems of the Northeast. Combined with the continued exploitation of the region's natural resources, this has kept alive local "tribal" groups' demands for independence, or at least for more regional autonomy; armed insurgent groups have proliferated in recent times, often operating in alliance with similar armed groups in the forests of northern Burma (Baruah 2001, 2005; Hazarika 1995; Bhattacharya 2014; Lintner 1996).

Beyond these legal and financial quandaries, the liberal countries sharing the Massif have taken a rather pragmatic path to the management of their national minorities. The philosophy is essentially that if peripheral peoples can take care of themselves without being an obstacle to national wealth, a burden on the national economy, or a threat to the nation, and if they can even contribute to the national economy—through ethnic tourism, for instance—they are welcome to remain as different from lowlanders as they wish. The end result, it is theorized, is a "natural" integration into the majority through market forces, the media, and national education.

The general introduction of market economies in China (1978), Vietnam (1986), and Laos (1986) marked a shift in socialist policies on national minorities toward those of their capitalist neighbors. Pragmatism, key to a free market economy, and the race to political and economic modernization have gradually eroded security concerns. In the whole Massif, only Burma still constitutes an unfortunate exception to the above trend despite progress toward democracy since 2011. In Northeast India, the picture in the "tribal" majority hill states of Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya is somewhat different, since many of the English-educated Christianized hill groups are in some sense more "modern" and "Westernized" than the average Indian in the subcontinent's heartland. However, an attitude of superiority among India's ruling elite toward the indigenous groups living in the country's northeast still persists.

The disinterest of lowland majorities toward highland cultural differences can be theorized in a concentric Mandala model, fundamental in Asia, which rates degrees of civilization from the core outward based on distance and geographic, linguistic, religious, economic, cultural, and historical distinctions (Drekmeier 1962). The highland/lowland dichotomy, contested by scholars (Brookfield 2011) following the publication of Scott's 2009 book, has in fact long been a central narrative fueled by age-old lowland prejudices against the distant, heavily forested, little-known highlands, home of suspicious people among whom malevolent spirits were thought to roam freely (Reid 1988; Poisson 2009). For sedentary lowlanders seeing

themselves as “cooked,” a classic Chinese term for a civilized society, the highlands and their forest barbarians were believed to be “raw” (Fiskesjö 1999). All across the Massif, groups dwelling higher up have been assigned derogatory labels; those living in intermediate regions of moderate altitude with thin forest cover, large expanses under permanent cultivation, and closer proximity to dominant lowland civilizations were deemed more palatable for political alliances.

In a continuation of this outlook, since the 1980s governments have blamed highlanders for most, if not all, of the deforestation, land erosion, and chemical poisoning of land and nearly every watershed around the Massif, despite their minuscule numbers compared to national majorities. Swiddening is publicly decried by state officials as harmful to the environment. To eradicate its practice, isolated populations are forced to relocate along national road networks—a rampant strategy in Laos—and crop substitution programs are implemented everywhere to sedentarize swidders and permanently shift them to commercial agriculture.

But what many officials fail to stress is that other factors have even more significant impacts on highland forest degradation and land erosion: massive illegal logging often done right under the nose of lenient state agents who turn a blind eye; the state-sponsored migration of millions of lowlanders to the uplands to alleviate lowland demographic pressures and import labor for construction and mining; the ill-adapted agricultural practices of migrants who have little experience farming in the highlands; and massive road works, railways, power lines, irrigation systems, water retention dams, and hydroelectric schemes initiated by the state that cut through sensitive areas. This is part and parcel of ventures such as the colossal Go West program in Southwest China (Leibold 2014).

Such a history of mistrust means that in the Massif today, highlanders generally face governments stubbornly showing the way while lacking reliable cultural information about them, and governments vigorously implementing policies of cultural integration and economic standardization (Duncan 2004). Education, in principle a tool for emancipation, is geared toward Sinization, Hinduization, Thai-ization, Kinh-ization, and the likes (Hansen 1999; Lee 2001; Messier and Michaud 2012). Tourism, booming in the Massif, becomes a crucial factor in this equation. Domestic tourists from the new middle classes are increasingly excited by the “barbarians within.” And beyond, there is hardly a travel agency in the world today that does not display brochures advertising a colorful Massif minority man, woman, or child, in the process reducing them to hollow symbols.

8. CONCLUSION: THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN MASSIF TODAY AND TOMORROW

In the middle of the 20th century, the drastic forces of change that shook the lowlands impacted the highlands as their effects rippled outward. This momentous time in Asian history saw the rise of communist insurrections and a succession of civil wars (China, Vietnam, Laos); the demise of European colonialism with the conclusion of the British Raj in 1947 and of French Indochina in 1954; and the establishment of socialist regimes in China (1949), Vietnam (1954 in the north, 1975 in the south), Burma (the Ne Win regime from 1962 to 1989), Laos (1975), Cambodia (the Khmer Rouge in 1975–1979, then the Vietnamese occupation until 1989), and India, where Nehru followed from 1947 to 1964 a policy of nonalignment within inches of bona fide socialism. Malaysia accessed independence in 1957. Collectivization in China and Vietnam proved tragic and with the Soviet bloc about to implode in the 1980s, socialist regimes opened up to the market economy. Martial law in Taiwan, promulgated in 1949, came to an end in 1987; meanwhile, Burma collapsed politically and has been ruled as Myanmar by a military dictatorship from 1989 to 2015. India is catching up with China as powerhouses of the world economy while American-backed, capital-intensive, and war-free Thailand, Taiwan, and Malaysia joined the ranks of most economically developed countries sharing the Massif.

Indirect heirs to such a rowdy recent history, the range of challenges significantly impacting highland lives and livelihoods today is overwhelming. For upland minorities in a comparatively weak political position, livelihood issues usually manifest themselves more seriously than for lowland majorities and, by extension, national governments. How these trials are resolved greatly impacts highland populations and determines in large part how they adapt to change.

Most challenges relate to what has been theorized as the “agrarian transition” paradigm, in which rural life centered on subsistence agriculture gives way to industrial agriculture and converts peasants into waged workers serving the growing demands of industrialists and urban areas (Kelly 2011). Many issues can also be connected to debates on modernization, globalization, and development (Hall, Hirsch, and Li 2011), in the wake of which thought-provoking research has blossomed around the notions of agency, resistance, and the indigenization/vernacularization of modernity (Scott 1990; Sahlins 1999; Ortner 2006; Merry 2006). We now turn briefly to some of these trends and include a few telling examples.

In the highlands, distance has helped shield many people from some of the dramatic global events of the 20th century, but not all of them.

Groups in the midland regions of the Massif saw their strategic advantage as trade intermediaries vanish as road infrastructure began to extend into the highlands, bringing the modern state and its agents. Their old feudal organizations were declared unsuitable to the modern world—both socialist and capitalist. Subsistence agriculture, adjusted to the household's needs and often based on swiddening, was almost overnight branded economically and environmentally unsound and has been replaced with cash cropping and plantations geared to market demand; this has exposed often ill-informed and inadequately literate highlanders to the hazards of brutal market shifts most of them are not yet equipped to fully apprehend or adjust to.

The switch to highland commercial agriculture has been supported by the circulation of international capital and the globalization of the agricultural market as well as in large part the new hegemony of Western discourse on environmental protection as conveyed to the local level through development projects conceived and implemented by externally funded international agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Hand in hand with international environmentalist discourse and the spreading of cash cropping has come the sedentarization of mobile or semimobile groups in permanent village sites. Such drastic changes have opened the way for the final monetization of highland exchanges, with payment by barter narrowed to a circle of close kin. Increasing recourse to the market has brought goods and commodities that have never before been readily available in the mountains and improved opportunities for the sale of local agricultural produce. In particular, channels for the provision of cash-cropping inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides have opened up. However, downstream, dangerously high amounts of chemicals are washed down by monsoon rains that the ever-shrinking forest cover cannot hold back as effectively as before.

The national economic programs in the Massif are all geared toward economic growth and cultural progress. Decades of applied social evolutionism and civilizational rhetoric inherited from Marxism and capitalism alike have given way to the language of development (Escobar 1995). Countless agencies from the affluent world knock at the door to offer goods and services—and the loans to help pay for them—and the technology and expert knowledge of the international development industry is relentlessly applied to improve minority health, education, and customary agricultural practices (Li 2007). Ensuring better gender balances and providing opportunities for children is also high on the agenda. All these initiatives, well intentioned as they may be, play directly into governments' strategy of integrating minorities into the national identity and economy. In the process, distinct cultural features are paid only subsidiary attention as other issues are considered far more urgent by the powers-that-be.

China clearly has a strong central policy of controlling and integrating its southwestern *shaoshu minzu* (Harrell 2002). The region is considered politically sensitive because of its international borders, richness in natural resources important to national interests, intensive agriculture providing a substantial portion of the country's food, and potential for the migration of growing numbers of surplus lowlanders (Nyíri 2011). Han immigration to the southwest, much as in Tibet, comprises a national goal to eventually outnumber locals and, over the long term, take final political, economic, and cultural control of these margins (Hansen 2005). If there did exist organized resistance to this invasion, no news of it would be allowed to filter out. Tourism, mentioned above as one means of revitalizing local cultures, is controlled and formatted by the state and state-supported enterprises such that only designated areas, nonthreatening ethnic groups, and carefully selected cultural practices can be safely displayed to tourists (Swain 2013). Many nationally famous places such as Lijiang, Dali, and Lugu Lake in Yunnan and clusters of Miao villages in Guizhou and Hunan fit this description (Notar 2006; Nyíri 2006).

On paper, India's policy of giving the special status of Scheduled Tribes to indigenous groups may seem well considered, but this is belied by the reality in Northeast India. Nehru adopted a policy of letting northeastern indigenous people develop according to their own genius (Elwin 1964). In the decades following Indian independence, the region was of interest to the central government mainly because of security concerns along its long international borders. However, the Naga demand for sovereignty was left to fester and resulted in the formation of armed insurgent outfits along the Indo-Burmese border. Soon the Mizo and other indigenous groups also rebelled. When the use of massive force (including mass dislocation and forced village regrouping schemes) did not help weed out the insurgents (Bhaumik 1997), tactics were changed and efforts were made to "integrate" indigenous groups into the national mainstream through strategies such as the promotion of Hindi as a lingua franca and the dedication of enormous funds in the name of development. However, lack of accountability and high levels of corruption have meant that not much has changed for the better on the ground in terms of building roads and setting up industries; moreover, huge amounts of money are believed to have ended up in the hands of the many regional insurgent groups that demand anything from increased regional autonomy to complete independence. As in neighboring Burma, although for different historical causes, the area has been characterized by continuous low-intensity conflicts ever since independence (Baruah 2001, 2005). Indeed, tensions exist between the state governments and the central government, among the states themselves, between plains dwellers and highland populations, among

religious groups, and between local people and migrants from other parts of India and Bangladesh.

Until very recently, the Bangladeshi government's attitude toward its tiny ethnic and religious minorities was one of repression. In the constitution there is reference to "small ethnic groups," but it does not describe these minorities as indigenous peoples. Moreover, there is a strong sense among most Bangladeshis that the country is a Muslim Bengali nation. It took ethnic minorities decades of resistance and even organized armed resistance—as with the formation of the Shanti Bahini in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)—to get the state to agree to negotiate with them. It took even longer before an agreement was signed between the government of Bangladesh and minority groups in 1997, granting a limited level of autonomy to the three hill districts in the CHT. State relations with minorities have never been good, but they have varied over time depending on the government in Dacca and from region to region. However, much of the antiminority aggression in the country is best understood in political and economic terms, as many minority people have been dispossessed of their lands and subsequently harassed.

Burma (Myanmar) has Southeast Asia's most prominent history of using its military to crush internal opposition. The Karen, some of whom harbor a desire for political autonomy, have been fighting the central Burmese government for decades. The Shan and Wa control large sections of their semiautonomous state thanks to armed resistance financed by thriving drug trafficking. Resistance is waged not only for political autonomy based on ethnic and religious distinction but also in concert with profitable smuggling operations centered on the processing of opium and ephedrine into morphine, heroin, and methamphetamines. Despite the appearance of a softening of the military's iron fist, highland Burma still faces a depressing story of forced displacement, exploitation, abuse, and desperate flight over the borders, with no real solution in sight (Horstmann 2011; Sadan 2013).

In Laos, a vigorous relocation program is gradually forcing thousands of highland villagers into larger groupings under the Lao state's gaze (Evrard and Goudineau 2004). A deeply rooted mistrust between old royalist factions in certain highland groups and the socialist state have meant that armed struggle endures even after the revolutionary forces' official victory in 1975. The Xaysomboun Special Region was set up as late as the 1990s to isolate and seal off from outside observers pockets of alleged Hmong resistance. Clearly, however, with nearly half its population belonging to various non-Lao ethnicities, Laos cannot afford to wage all-out war on its minorities. A degree of negotiation has to prevail.

In Thailand, a communist insurgency brewing in the north and northeast until the late 1980s made the state wary of certain groups ethnically connected

to revolutionary struggles in Laos and Vietnam. Resentment and defiance still occasionally creep into official rhetoric, but these have now largely given way to environmental mantras about eliminating swiddening and establishing protected ecological zones that must be emptied of minority inhabitants. With just over 1 percent of its population belonging to the 11 *chao khao* registered in official statistics, Thailand has arguably all the leverage it needs to end negotiation at will.

Vietnam has officially made peace with its minority nationalities (*các dân tộc thiểu số*), since their official recognition in the late 1970s and explicit inclusion in the national constitution. As in China and Laos, however, the ideology behind this recognition has been subject to criticism (Michaud 2009). Moreover, the Vietnamese government still contends that dangerously high levels of political dissent are simmering in the Central Highlands in particular, supported mainly by United States–based “antirevolutionary” diasporas. Christian activism is also a bone of contention, chiefly in the southern highlands but increasingly also in the north (Ngo 2011).

At present, Cambodia, Peninsular Malaysia, and Taiwan seem to have a comparatively moderate number of issues with their somewhat small numbers of highland minorities, though this does not mean that, seen from the minorities’ viewpoint, these issues are not of considerable importance. In Cambodia, this possibly relates to the fact that the post–Khmer Rouge and post–Vietnamese occupation state is rather frail (Bourdier 2015). In Malaysia, and even more in Taiwan, highland groups have begun to exercise political pressure on their national governments and demand that their needs be better heard (Endicott 2015; Simon 2006). This process is following a path similar to indigenous groups in colonial nations such as Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, where political connections are made with like-minded counterparts abroad through international organizations. Legal resistance is mounting and customary identities are being revalued.

In all 10 countries under consideration, highland peoples face significant and distinct challenges. How issues including livelihood strategies, environmental degradation and protection, gender equality, cultural revitalization, and citizen rights are resolved at national and regional levels will affect a highland population of 100 million people. The intersection of increasing globalization, easy access to communication technologies, and the ubiquitous Internet will have unpredictable consequences on this equation.

This historical dictionary project attempts to create a snapshot of the Southeast Asian Massif, portraying its great past and present diversity of minority populations at the beginning of the 21st century. Our focus is on their myriad languages, unique cultures, and alternative political structures as well as their distinct responses to and engagement with globalization and the

modern state. The dictionary aims to increase general knowledge about this highland region and the people inhabiting it. We hope that our readers will carry this project forward to learn from and engage with the peoples of the Southeast Asian Massif.

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NOTE

1. Google Scholar indicates that by 2016, *The Art of Not Being Governed* has been quoted 1,700 times.